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ABSTRACT

This paper considers the benefits of using an electronic portfolio as opposed to the more traditional type for the professional resume and treats the use of the electronic portfolio as a means of assessment of student, student teacher, and teacher performance, and as a marketing tool in job searches. The ease of distribution, storage and use, and the ability of the reader to select areas of interest from a menu is a strong reason for utilizing this approach. The capacity of hearing a statement of support rather than reading a letter of recommendation; seeing the person in a teaching situation, rather than reading the information; having a map show areas where experience was obtained, rather than seeing a list of states; and seeing examples of creative talents, rather than reading about them are all reasons for the use of this technology. The preparation time of the electronic portfolio exceeds the traditional resume. For the person having to serve on a search committee or the interviewer, the electronic approach is much easier and creates a more positive impression. Information is also provided on the hardware and software tools that are used. (AEF)

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Electronic Portfolio: Assessment, Resume, or Marketing Tool?

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Abstract:

Assessment and its management has been perceived as missing some of the aspects of the talent and skills found in individuals, but which were not readily displayed for the evaluator. Incorporating the use of a variety of technological approaches we can capture visual displays, tape the student, display materials, interview the student, let the student voice a philosophy, or incorporate any creative effort that will better represent the student's achievements. A completed portfolio can be viewed to determine the effectiveness and skills level of the student and to provide valuable decision making information for the job market.

Introduction

As our graduates make plans to begin a career in teaching, it is made quite evident that they must be prepared to compete in a technologically rich environment, as well as, provide traditional instruction. In an effort to provide them with the best means possible for demonstrating this duo nature, we have developed a plan of action called PROJECT TASK. The TASK is to use technology to prepare a resume that provides more than a traditional resume. The best hybrid description is an "Electronic Portfolio". Using the elements of an established portfolio and then rendering them with the assistance of electronic devices and software packages, the student exhibits the skills necessary to develop a high impact presentation of basic resume data, produce visual materials that lend themselves well to photographic format, utilize all the graphic and visual elements to create aesthetically pleasing support materials, demonstrate mastery of the software package(s) to produce the portfolio, and edit raw video, audio, and visual materials into compact, high-impact, clips that display skills and talents essential to the teaching process.

This presentation will cover the benefits of using an electronic portfolio as opposed to the more traditional type for the professional resume. In addition, it will treat the use of the electronic portfolio as a means of assessment of student, student teacher, and teacher performance, as well as the use of it to gain favorable consideration in the job market. This includes the obvious one of ease of distribution, storage, and use. The ability of the "reader" to select areas of interest from a simple menu, rather than having to thumb through page after page in search of a supporting item, and missing the point, is a strong reason for utilization of this approach. The capacity of hearing a statement of support rather than

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202
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read a letter of recommendation; seeing the person in a teaching situation, rather than reading that he/she teaches science, etc.; having a map show areas where experience was obtained rather than seeing a list of states; or seeing examples of the creative talents rather than reading the person has mastered a drawing/paint program, animation program, etc. are all reasons for the embrace of this emerging use of technology.

From the standpoint of the student involved in this project, this approach does require more time than the traditional resume. The time spent should be weighted against the type response one might expect from such an approach. Since it is impossible to learn all one would like in the course of a quarter or semester in a computer/technology course, the student is presented with an opportunity to revisit this area of study and use newer facilities, newer software packages, try new equipment, and receive help in learning about advances in the field, all of which will increase job market appeal. Many times, the activity involved in the development of such a display will cause the student to access areas of strength and weakness and prepare to enhance or correct as the need is indicated.

For the person having to serve on a search committee, or the interviewer, it is much easier and creates a more positive impression if the complete documentation for an individual will easily fit in a shirt pocket! Can you image, being able to take the entire stack of applicants materials with you in a small disk storage box, rather than wheeling it out in a box! If your notes are vague on a point, is it not easier to go to a menu and "click", rather than search, because there are no page numbers? The addition of color, motion, sound, and touches of creativity make the task less difficult than facing another copy on buff-colored paper.

The presentation will also provide information on the tools that are used, both hardware and software, will be discussed and sample products will be included in the handouts. As we developed the concept of the "Electronic Portfolio" we had to deal with all the possibilities of what might be included, such as: written materials, photo/portrait, pictures of display materials, recording of "Philosophy of Education", a verbal recommendation, a video of classroom activities, a rendering from a software package, a special report in the newspaper, outlining, menu items, and "?", the question mark representing an unknown that a creative person might think about that we had not yet put into the framework. [Example: Credits section to take care of unusual support or to take care of copyright.] In starting the project we dealt with the Macintosh platform as it was already in place and we had HYPERCARD and were ordering HYPERSTUDIO. In addition, programs such as ComputerEyes, Adobe Illustrator, Publish It!, Video Spigot, and QuickTime were already on the machines or readily available.

Part I Description of Project Task

In Winter 1994 our project work began with assessing our own abilities and facilities to determine just what could realistically be accomplished in the time allotted. We decided that we would limit the number of participants to 30 and that those should be volunteers. Our rationale was based upon the fact that we felt that a volunteer would have a self-motivating goal for completion of the task and the number was determined by the number of available computers. By Spring 1994, we were ready to pursue the project goals. Thirty students were selected to see if they wanted to volunteer for this task. Of this number, we had eleven who elected to do the project and stuck with the commitment even

though there were numerous problems with the technology. First, using 4mb of RAM would not support plans for digitized images within the framework of the electronic resume. OCR software was missing. Our lab caught the Merry Christmas virus. etc. Needless to say, this was a period of great learning and mastery of problem solving.

Using HyperCard as the format for the electronic portfolio, the students developed individual cards for the various elements of a resume. Though we encouraged creativity, there were key elements that were required. These elements included such things as personal data, education, experience, philosophy, and skills. It did not take long before students were asking for color capability, so we began searching for a tool that would fit our design as it existed, but allow for changes and expansion of the ideas. After a year of testing products that we could obtain, the software package we selected was Digital Chisel, from Pierian Spring in Portland, Oregon.

During this quarter of work with the student teachers, we had a beta product that let us get a better feel for what would work and what would not; how to proceed with fewer problems for the developers, and a long list of things that would permit us to develop a better product. One of which was a series of workshops for fellow faculty to help them become familiar with the technology and therefore use it more in classes. The trickle down effect was viewed as a way to enhance the student's view of what might be done to showcase work and visualize him/herself as a proficient user of technology.

Summer quarter gave us the opportunity to invite 31 teachers, working within the School of Education or teaching Education support courses, to participate in a series of workshops being taught in three levels: beginner, intermediate, and advanced. The participants were encouraged to take two of the three. With this approach, only one participant dropped out. This approach provided us with a base of instructors who would know and feel comfortable with the technology and could, in turn, help the students as they planned and developed materials applicable to the portfolio.

With the coming of Fall quarter we had taken the information we had picked up from our "beta" group, and done some revamping of the requirements. First we selected only students known to have had the computer course, a record of being dedicated students, and who might volunteer for this activity. This time we had a smaller group to ask to volunteer. Our bonus to this group was the use of a laptop for the quarter to use to develop the electronic portfolio and to help in making out lesson plans, developing handouts, making tests, etc. Of this 15 elected to try it, with 4 dropping out after a couple of weeks for lack of time. After the group began work we received our site license and software for Digital Chisel, so we only told the students we had it available for them, if they wanted to use it. Several experimented with it, but only one actually produced his electronic portfolio on it.

At the end of the term, the quality of the portfolios was improving. It seems that the volunteer group does devote time and energy to this project. In fact, several of the participants wanted to continue work on the portfolio into the next quarter. With the current quarter underway, we have 11 participants with laptops. They meet on Monday nights for specialized instruction, and on Saturday mornings for tutorials on software, skills, etc. It may say something to handpicking a group from the start, because none of the students has missed a session yet.

Part II - Applications of Project Task

A. Assessment

The measurement of knowledge and skills acquired by the student at any given point in education is a prime concern for the evaluator. In our case, many courses in the School of Education have the student develop curriculum materials, thereby requiring skills that are put on display in the forms of printed materials, whether they be in traditional text format or in artistic endeavors such as bulletin boards, posters, banners, labels, etc. As the student progresses through the planned curriculum, these materials become greater in volume, and may even emerge several times in different courses (with no apparent changes) . Each person placed in the role of evaluator has the task of determining IF the student has gained skills, rides on pre-existing skills, or is using someone else skills. Since the evaluation is valuable to the on-going process, it is desirable that it be as thorough and accurate as possible.

The electronic portfolio is evolving to the point that students are now starting the design and accumulation of data for it in the early stages of entry into the teacher education program. The placement of the basic development of the design and the instruction necessary for acquisition of technological skills are contained within the required EDU 365 Computer Applications course, and followed up with an elective EDU 365 Instructional Technology course. Since these courses may be taken prior to admission to Teacher Education, the student has the opportunity to have the foundation in place for the eventual use of Electronic Portfolios as a required assessment tool.

The electronic portfolio will permit any evaluator, instructor, supervisor, or potential employer, to view the overall creativity and skills development of the individual. Within the portfolio will be the scanned images showing materials the student has developed. The scanned images may be still or motion video, commercially processed images of photographic work, lesson plans, sound clips, animated art work, or computer created designs. In essence, the only handicapping feature of the accumulation of data is that of technological support in the form of powerful computers, software packages, and knowledge of how to use these tools.

In the use of the Electronic Portfolio, the evaluator may view the samples of the student work in any order, and not be frustrated by having to shuffle materials around, plow through a box of "stuff", nor be restricted in comparing early versions of a piece with a later improved version. As the technology supplies us with more creative tools, the developer of an electronic portfolio and the evaluator will be brought closer together in the process. The developer will have clearer guidelines of what is being sought in this medium, and the evaluator will be trained to access the information in a more productive manner, using those aspects of the finished piece that are needed for this evaluation and not spending time on elements that are unrelated.

The entire evaluation of a person can be presented in a package that is easy to handle, fits in a "shoebox" , can be edited, up-graded, and made a personal statement. At present, this is a developing process and not as free of complications as it will be in the near future.

B. Resume

The very idea of having to compete with another person for a job is a frightening experience for today's student. The job market is structured in such a way that many times the job title does not necessarily

reflect exactly what the work entails. The Electronic Portfolio, due to its compact size, permits the developer the luxury of designing a branching program that displays his/her talents and skills in several different lights. The developer may have a section for job placement in various areas of employment, such as: management, teaching (training), or technical support. After preparing the master portfolio, it may be sent out in answer to totally different job description notices. The employer may then look at only the section that is applicable to the position that is available, but may also see the relevance of other training and skills and a valuable resource in someone with multi-level training or placement. Still, the employer did not have to wade through all the materials that were unrelated to the specific position, unless it was by personal choice. In addition, the volume of information does not cause the employer to hesitate to view the materials as it is not evident from the package what volume might be hidden there.

For the developer with beginning skills, the Electronic Portfolio may appear as a stack of slides (or cards) that contain the same information, presented in the same manner as the traditional resume. As the skills are developed, the product may take on a more refined and diverse look. The up-grade ability makes it possible for the student to work in new information and never be without an updated package to present for consideration in less time than it takes to update text materials and then print it out in the quality necessary to distribute, and at much less cost!

C. Marketing Tool

The appearance of the packaging of the Electronic Portfolio is easier to prepare than trying to second guess what appearance is required to impress a potential employer. The development of a simple, tasteful label is the best start. Later, more commercial appearances may be developed in order to attract attention. At present, the very size and ease off handling is the most attractive feature.

The content of the Electronic Portfolio is the next phase of impressing the job market. For the developer, the ability to display works, and not risk their being damaged, displaying them at their best, and increasing the manner in which they might be used, are all factors that may attract the potential employer. In our case, students who have developed Electronic Portfolios have been hired in the positions of choice and though we have no supporting data at this time, we would like to believe that the demonstration of technological skills, without flaunting them, was an important factor.

The jobs of choice are difficult to obtain and just the percentage of success of our developers leads us to believe that the project was a success in the area of marketing their skills.

The distribution of copies of the portfolio is easy, the duplication costs are very reasonable, and the disks may be recycled after they serve their purpose at the point of evaluation, unless needed further. In this case, they are easy to store and maintain.

As we consider the overall impact of Electronic Portfolios, we see this phase as one of adventure, skills development, and certainly one in which the final product may vary greatly from developer to developer. The very nature of the project is such that there is little chance for an end to its importance to the student. We must serve the needs of the student in the areas of assessment and marketing of skills, and this is one approach in which the student developer has the final control on how to display

the events of his/her professional development in the best manner. Finally, we stress that all the skills used in the development of the Electronic Portfolio are only the start. The student/developer must realize that life-long learning must continue if the he/she is to continue professional development and present the evidence of acquiring knowledge and display the technological mastery necessary to remain current.